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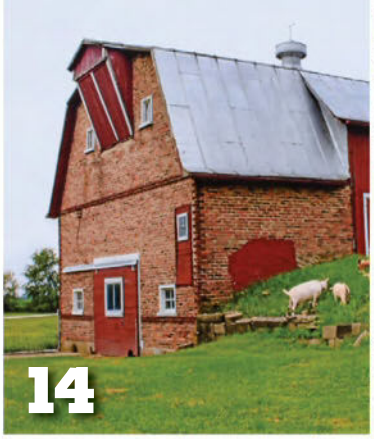

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PHOTO BY MARK CHRISTOPHER COOPER/SHUTTERSTOCK

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PHOTO BY JON FIBEGER

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Listen to Your Mother

THERE COMES A POINT IN LIFE when we learn that our mothers are pretty much always right. Growing up, mine told me that everything happens for a reason. I never bought in on the destiny part, but Mom instilled in me the belief that I'll always land on my feet. She empowered me to take a few chances and to bet on myself.

That's exactly what Bethanee Wright did when she started her own Community Supported Agriculture farm, Winterfell Acres. Bethanee grew up in a suburb of Milwaukee, and the family's business was a hardware store. Unlike so many of the farmers we feature in a given issue, Beth didn't have a generational push to farm. But she loved growing food, so she took a risk.

Read about Bethanee's CSA on page 28.

Bethanee started her CSA four years ago on rented farmland with 20 subscribers. Now she and her husband are settling into their dream farm and hoping to serve more than 100 subscribers in 2017. Bethanee's journey, risks and all, is featured on page 28.

Things often work out even when the risks don't pay off. Just ask Ted Blankenship of Rose Hill, Kansas. Ted bought six heifers shortly after purchasing his farm. The plan was to use them for lawn mowing and for food. His experience left me laughing and eventually left him happily cow-less. Ted's chaotic foray into cattle farming is on page 56.

For some heartwarming stories focusing on moms, just in time for Mother's Day on May 14, be sure to read the moving tributes on pages 58 and 59. As for me, I owe my mom a debt of gratitude for always letting me bet on myself. It seems to have worked out so far. Thanks, Mom.

Alex Wendland Senior Editor

Send your pictures, stories and memories by visiting ***farmandranchliving.com*** and clicking **Submit Your Story.**

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Enter 6 photos and an essay!

- **Interiors** Show us the place you retreat to—perhaps your kitchen, your living room, a cozy bedroom or bath? Is your craft room your happy place? Maybe the potting shed is where you find solace. Wherever it is you go in your home to relax and regroup, we'd love a peek inside.
- **The View** What do you see when you step outside your back door? Is your home surrounded by beautiful country?
- **Gardens** Does your outdoor space become paradise each summer? Show us the power of your green thumb.
- **Farmland** Is your homestead defined by picturesque pastures and rolling acreage? Do you keep a wedding-worthy barn?

The grand prize is $500, but other entries can still win! The first-, second- and third-prize winners get $250, $150 and $100, respectively.

HERE'S HOW TO ENTER:

1. Go to **www.farmandranchliving.com/contests** and click on the My Country Home link.
2. Fill out the submission form and upload your photos and essay.
3. Click Submit.
4. To enter another category, repeat steps 1, 2 and 3.

The contest ends July 7, so start snapping!

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LOVIN' THE LIFE

Photos and stories from readers

Mama Cat Missed a Kitten

BY DALEEN COWGAR ***NORTON, OHIO***

New kittens on the farm would normally be cause for celebration, but when I was 13, our mama cat, Joyce, gave birth on our porch on a cold, windy day. To top it off, she took only one of her two kittens to a warmer place, leaving the other one without shelter. She'd never been known as a great mom, but she had always been better than this.

I scooped the little guy up and started feeding him every hour. I couldn't go to sleep, so I just lay there on the couch, waiting for Spotsy to start crying for the bottle. I fed him at 1 a.m., then at 2 and 3. This kitten didn't just want to be fed; he wanted me to cuddle with him.

Finally, I woke my sister up at 7 so I could get some sleep. When I got up, I found out that she and my cousin Josiah had gone searching for Joyce and found her in the hayloft—a nice, safe spot for her kittens.

After finding Joyce, my sister and cousin took the abandoned kitten to his mama. She accepted him eagerly. While I was disappointed that I didn't get to help search, I was relieved I wouldn't have to stay up all night again. Both kittens survived Joyce's parenting and grew to be fat and sleek mouse hunters.

Spotsy was eventually welcomed back by his mom, Joyce (top), and with his brother grew to be a great farm cat.

1 "Grandpa Lee assists 17-month-old Grace as she bottle-feeds our newborn donkey," says grandmother **Janice Teinert of La Grange, Texas.** "The three of them together created such a sweet moment."

2 "Our 2-year-old grandson Gray is on his way to help feed the bottle calves," says grandfather **Dickson Sistare of Lancaster, South Carolina.** "He spends all of his time at the barn."

3 "Our grandson loves playing with the baby goats," says **Sandra Weber of Mohnton, Pennsylvania.** Carter finally got a chance to feed one on a recent trip to a friend's farm.

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Marlene on the 620 that once belonged to her dad; right, kids ride in a colorful wagon train.

Spring Is Finally Here!

It can be tough to get farmers off of their fields on an April morning when the weather is good, but out they come each year for Plow Day.

Many people go down for the pancake breakfast, putt-putting to the gathering on old 2-cycle John Deeres. They swap stories of restorations, repairs, unusual sounds and what they think other tractor drivers are doing wrong. Families and farmers come to celebrate the new season with tractor and carriage rides.

I usually seek out one tractor in particular. It used to belong to my father. After his death, it made its way into the hands of someone intent on restoring it. The new owner, Paul Rouse, graciously shared the restoration story with me and let me pose with the tractor.

I also love watching my neighbor Steve thrill the youngsters with a ride in his multi-colored wagon train. Each little car on the train is painted to represent one of the big tractor manufacturers. Kids around here learn at an early age to favor Fords, Deeres or one of the others.

Once all the tractors are lined up, the farmers make short work of the designated field with their synchronized plowing. What a fantastic way to spend a perfect spring morning.

MARLENE SMITH
HOMER, NEW YORK

Paul Rouse bought and restored the John Deere 620 that Marlene visits.

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DAN A. NEALEIGH
GREENVILLE, OHIO

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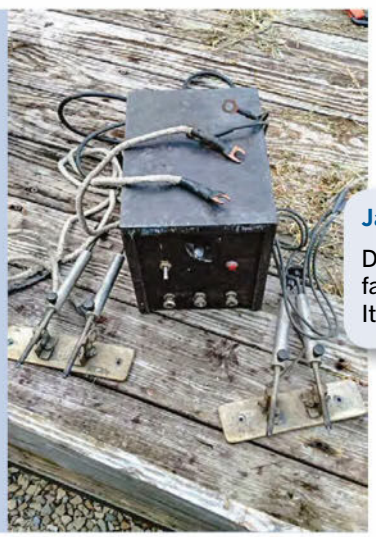

Post the riddles from your shed and help other readers solve their mysteries...like the strange object (left) that Jason Confer found.

Jason Confer ▶ Farm & Ranch Living

Does anyone know what this is? My father-in-law picked it up at an auction. It came with a bunch of other items.

If you have an idea, head to Facebook and post it as a reply below the photo. We'll see you there!

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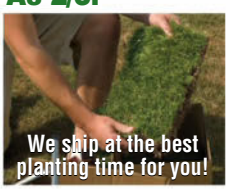

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BY ROSANNE FIBEGER *ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA* *PHOTOS BY JON FIBEGER*

The Hanson family farm is nestled in a picturesque valley.

Paradise Farm is located in Sand Lake Coulee, on the bluffs along the Mississippi River in La Crosse County, Wisconsin. It was once a dairy farm, part of 165 mostly wooded acres. The farm sits in its own valley, surrounded on three sides by forested hills; after you drive the curvy road to reach the property, it seems untouched by time. The Hanson family—my family—has lived here on Paradise Farm for several generations.

I own the farm with my three siblings, Eric Hanson, Signe Thompson and Sigurd Hanson. Eric lives on the land, and he has taken great care of the place. He keeps the paint fresh, puts on new roofs and more. He takes such pride in how lovely the farm looks.

The farm has many buildings that you don't often see anymore. Besides the farmhouse and barn, there is a machine shed, summer kitchen, woodshed, large granary and icehouse. Most buildings have been kept up or fixed up. The barn needs work, but it's a big barn, and its rehabilitation will require more money than we have. We keep looking for a grant or organization to help finance a full renovation of the barn.

The entire family views Paradise Farm as a treasure, and it is our favorite place to go. We have a lot of parties and gatherings there. During the summertime, we always have a hot dog roast, hayrides and hikes up the ridge into the woods. The children love playing Little House on the Prairie in the summer kitchen, and pretending to run a restaurant with the old wood stove that's in there.

Since the farm is surrounded by hills, there's lots of sledding in the winter. We also enjoy snowshoeing. My son Jon got engaged to his wife, Emily, while they were snowshoeing on the ridge one January.

Hayrides are a summertime favorite for Rosanne's grandkids.

Sack races at a family bridal shower keep everyone on their toes.

Stunning views abound from the ridge surrounding the farm.

Rosanne's grandson Brodie loves being around the tractors.

As times have changed, what farm owners do with their property has also changed. The farm continues to be a magnet for people.

We also love sharing the farm with others. The large granary shed is a great event center. We have held our family reunions, class reunions, wedding showers, baby showers and birthday parties in the granary. I'll never forget the thankfulness party we held for my husband, Fred, 10 years after his successful heart transplant. We celebrated with some 80 of our friends and family members, all of whom supported Fred during the trying days of his transplant and hospitalization.

A wealthy Norwegian immigrant, Ole Solberg, initially homesteaded our land, in 1858. Solberg built a three-story log house and brought in hired help, including a chauffeur. He planted numerous fruit trees and told the help they could eat from any tree—except a favorite apple that belonged to his wife. The forbidden apple tree reminded the farm workers of the Garden of Eden, so they began calling the place Paradise Farm.

My great-grandparents Peder and Pauline Hanson moved to the farm in 1888 and purchased it in 1893. Their son, my grandfather Carl Peter "Charlie" Hanson, had it registered as Paradise Farm in 1939 and painted the name on the side of the barn.

Like so many small family farms, Paradise eventually became too small to support a family. From the 1970s until the '90s, my father, along with my brother Eric, rented land from neighboring farms to make the operation sustainable. But nearby towns soon encroached upon the farm's boundaries. In 1993, Eric sold the dairy cows and took a job in town. Though the animals left that year, the tillable land continues to be rented by another farmer who lives several miles away. That income helps pay the farm's taxes.

As times have changed, what farm owners do with their property has also changed. The farm continues to be a magnet for people, and this past summer we rented it out for an event for the first time. Eric, Signe, Sigurd and I love sharing our treasure with others, and we hope to hang on to this paradise for as long as possible. FR

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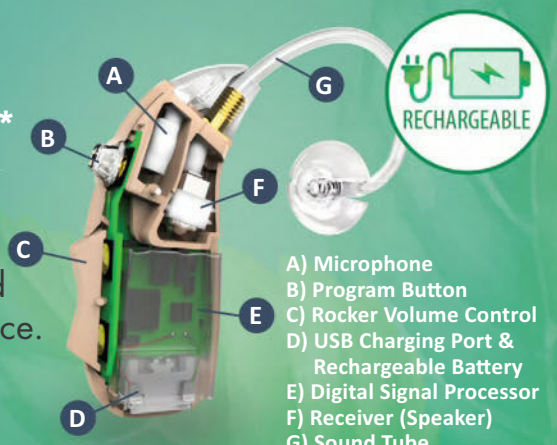

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Grace is excited to start raising her next herd of kids.

The Bleats Just Can't Be Beat

The hours are long and arduous, but raising goats brings sweet rewards.

BY GRACE GARDNER, AGE 12 ***GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO***

The morning began the same way as so many before it: I pulled on my rubber boots, my breath coming out in puffs from the effort. Wrapping my coat tightly around me, I trudged out to the Dorseys' field next door, where I was keeping three dairy goats. I had bred two of them in November, and one of my does, Smudge, was nearly three days overdue.

Reaching the field, I lifted the chain on the rusty gate; it squeaked its "good morning" as I swung it open. My light hit the shelter as I rounded the milk shed, and four small, frightened eyes shone out of the straw next to two big, wise ones.

"Oh, Smudge!" I cried.

Smudge had finally kidded! I hugged her and then picked up a moist, warm bundle. I nuzzled the newborn's fuzzy neck. She was a soft brown color with beautiful black socks. I named her Cinnamon.

I admired the second kid's white spots against fur as black as night.

"Just like her mama," I said. She would later be known as Mottle.

I knocked excitedly at the Dorseys' door, yelling, "Mrs. Naomi, the babies are here!"

Mrs. Naomi is a retired nurse, and I knew she could help me with the newborns. We dipped the kids' umbilical cords in iodine tincture to prevent infection and dried their wet, sticky legs. My parents showed up with their video camera and poured warm molasses water for the proud mama. The two tired kids, their tiny bellies stretched with colostrum, were in our toasty kitchen and settled down for their first nap by 7 that morning.

Smudge did not come into milk quickly, though. I had to milk her every couple of hours, squeezing out each drop for the kids.

The kids grew big and lively. Cinnamon learned to jump the fence with ease, and Mottle wasn't far behind. They would frolic in the fresh spring grass until I'd return to imprison them.

Soon my second doe, Dixie, gave birth to triplets. The babies grew fast, and horn buds sprouted on every head. We worked quickly to remove the buds, as nasty things happen if the horns aren't removed early enough.

My days followed a dreamy routine of milking, feeding, washing and playing with the kids. Every night I fell into my bed happy and exhausted. Then one day we received an answer to an ad we had placed about the goats. A woman from a dude ranch wanted to buy the triplets for herself and the other two for her neighbor. The goats would have a big field and good care, and she offered me a fair price.

What would it be like with them gone? No joyous bleats as I walked through the gate, no impatient kids to bottle-feed. They were going to a good home, however, and that made me happy. Now I'm looking forward to next spring, when I can breed my new doe, Naomi, and start the whole thing over again.

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FREEZE DRY AT HOME

Avid Chef Shares Her Best Kept Secret

Sharon Woolsey isn't afraid to experiment in the kitchen. Her two years in South America made her an adventurous chef; and, her husband and three children motivate her to cook healthy meals that everyone will enjoy.

Sharon is a hardworking mom trying to balance home management, part-time work, church and community involvement, and everything else.

"Of all the interesting, and innovative appliances I've worked with, this was possibly the most amazing, the most interesting, and the most innovative," Sharon said after her first few months with the Harvest Right freeze dryer.

This convenient freeze dryer is about the size of a mini-fridge and can be used in a variety of locations such as a kitchen, spare room, laundry room, or even a garage. Sharon keeps her freeze dryer in her garage during the winter and brings it into her food storage closet during the hot summer months.

This appliance is a game changer for a lot of reasons. It can freeze dry 6 to 10 pounds of food at a time, which amounts to 1,500 pounds of food per year. When stored properly, freeze-dried foods can last for 15 to 25 years, making it an essential tool for anyone who practices food storage like Sharon.

Freeze drying leaves the nutritional integrity, as well as the taste and appearance, of the food completely intact. A grape still looks like a grape; a slice of peach still looks as fresh as it did before it was freeze dried; meats and seafood stay fresh and taste fresh even after being freeze dried. Whether freeze drying full meals like lasagna and beef stew or preserving dairy products like cheddar cheese, yogurt and ice cream, Sharon has the confidence that the food is going to taste great.

Besides preserving meals as long term storage for her family and making delicious baked goods, Sharon has also found her freeze dryer useful in preserving her garden bounty. Like many avid gardeners, Sharon saw her food going to waste because she couldn't use the produce fast enough. Now, she has a solution that keeps her goods fresh until she's ready to use them.

"[I love to preserve] my fresh produce in the freeze dryer because it plumps back to life so beautifully. It's also the absolute best way to preserve herbs, especially as they retain 100 percent of their flavor."

Produce from the garden isn't all a freeze dryer can save from going to waste. Leftover meals and ripening grocery-store produce stay out of the trash can thanks to the freeze dryer. With foods that ripen quickly, like bananas or avocados, the Harvest Right freeze dryer can preserve them in their prime. Sharon noted that her Harvest Right freeze dryer is "a game changer" for her beautifully preserved avocados.

Harvest Right Freeze Dryers are easy to use, affordable, and preserve large batches of food within 24 to 36 hours.

The ability to keep food from going bad helps offset the price tag, Sharon said. Families throw out $2,250 worth of food a year on average. That number alone almost pays for the freeze dryer. It is perfect to freeze dry food that would otherwise go to waste so that it can be used as a meal in a few weeks or to be eaten in 25 years.

Freeze dried pineapple, grapes and yogurt drops have replaced Sharon's kid's favorite candy. She turns freeze-dried kale and Greek yogurt into powder to add to her morning smoothies; and freeze-dried ice cream dipped in chocolate has become a popular treat at her house parties. Sharon has found a way to turn this remarkable food storage technique into a way of life.

Learn more about this revolutionary appliance at HarvestRight.com or call 1-800-881-8178.

A Letter to Young Farmers

A committed gardener and nutrition professor encourages young

I've grown food for almost 50 years—very seriously for at least 20—but I've never needed to market the products of my soil to pay my way. So I'll start by acknowledging that our stakes in this enterprise are very different. Nevertheless, I hope you'll find what I have to say useful.

In the class I teach about food and the environment, one of the readings is a multipage chart showing the change over time in the number of farms in the United States and the percentage of the total population engaged in farming. Right after Europeans landed in North America, almost everyone did some food growing; they had to if they were going to eat. But between 1790 and 1890, when the new nation's population ballooned from roughly 4 million to 62 million, the percentage of farmers was halved. Yet as the 20th century opened, well over one-third of the population was still farming. Most people knew farmers; many people had close relatives who farmed.

My father's family had farmed in Iowa, and his oldest brother still did when I was a child. Selling some of the family's farmland helped us through the Great Depression. I can still remember my mother sitting on the front steps crying with relief when the check arrived. But I never lived on a farm.

After the soil fertility-destroying catastrophe of the Dust Bowl and the outmigration of Southern sharecroppers to wartime jobs in the 1940s, the farming population had dropped to 12 percent by 1950. Federal policies, big machines, and the crop chemicals that came to characterize "modern" farming after World War II encouraged the expansion of the remaining farms. "Get big or get out" was the slogan, and farmers did: As farm size more than doubled between 1950 and 1990, the farm population crashed from 25 million to 4.6 million.

By 1993, only 2 percent of Americans were living on farms, and the government concluded that there were too few people actually farming to be worth counting. "Farm residence is no longer a reliable indication of whether or not someone is involved in farming," stated the U.S. Census Bureau in its final issue of Residents of Farm and Rural Areas in 1991. "The cost of collecting and publishing statistics on farm residents and farmers in separate reports could no longer be justified."

And today, as farm size continues to increase, though more slowly, and as the number of farms still declines, the average farmer keeps getting older. This farmer was 58.3 in the 2012 census, a continuation of a 30-year trend of steady aging out. Only 6 percent of farmers are under 35. Which is, I think, you.

Ordinary Americans ... are newly interested in these healthy young folks they see at farmers markets.

—JOAN DYE GUSSOW

food producers to connect Americans with their meals. **BY JOAN DYE GUSSOW**

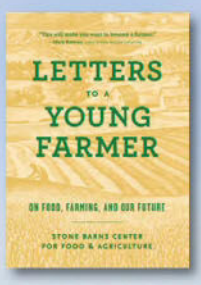
To chart the trend of those statistics into the future is to wonder where you might be heading. Economist Stewart Smith, noticing that the declining portion of the food dollar that went to the farmer was tracking toward zero, once asked whether there would be any farming in U.S. agriculture in the years ahead. Indeed, to wander the supermarket today is to begin to ask whether there will be any actual food-growing involved in U.S. agriculture. With millions of acres of our farmland devoted to growing corn destined to feed animals and cars and be turned into sugar, it is not a stupid question.

So where do you fit in? You were born into a world in which very few people had a farmer in their life and "food" was a category that included tens of thousands of items with no recognizable relationship to the soil. I doubt very much that your family raised you to be a farmer. So I suspect you've committed yourself to this profession because you want to grow real food for people, not commodity crops, not raw materials— but food. And although there are still 40,000 items in the average grocery store, you are coming into agriculture when sales of those food-like objects are declining, farmers markets are multiplying, and another sort of food supply begins to look possible.

Ordinary Americans, even those who have no memories of farmers in their families, are newly interested in these healthy young folks they see at farmers markets, and they are increasingly aware that farmers, not giant corporations, are the reliable producers of safe and nutritious food. Nationally, we have decided that children need to meet farmers and learn, in school gardens, how food grows. In certain circles, farmers are even considered glamorous, though they themselves know well that the daily lives they lead are not.

All this means that, remarkably enough, you will be privileged to grow food for eaters, not just for corporations, and you will sometimes—perhaps often—have a chance to meet someone who is personally grateful for the crops you produce. Maybe you'll be standing at your stall in a local farmers market and a grown woman with tears in her eyes will come up and say she hasn't seen a sweet potato like yours since she pulled one out of the ground 40 years earlier. So although you're unlikely to make a lot of money doing what you love, you're very likely to make a lot of people happy. Thank you for feeding us.

[*Excerpted from* Letters to a Young Farmer: On Food, Farming, and Our Future *by Stone Barns Center for Food & Agriculture, edited by Martha Hodgkins, published by Princeton Architectural Press, 2017. Reprinted here with permission of the publisher.*]



EDITOR'S NOTE: I had a chance to read *Letters to a Young Farmer* before its release and thought these essays would resonate with our readers. There are dozens of entries from writers who have been farming most of their lives—people like Joel Salatin, Verlyn Klinkenborg and Temple Grandin. The book is an honest look at food production and an inspiring take on farm life. *Letters to a Young Farmer* is sold on Amazon and at bookstores. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

— A.W.

GUSSOW: SUSAN FREIMAN/NATUREWALTZPHOTOS; BACKGROUND: BALAZS JUSTIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

From Coop to Co-Op

Audrey Henburn and Jennifer Heniston get cameos in this farm production.

BY SHELLIE McSLOY ***CINCINNATUS, NEW YORK***

If you have the privilege of owning chickens, you may be familiar with "chicken math." For those who aren't aware of the concept, let me explain.

Once you become a proud chicken mama or papa, a phenomenon occurs where you feel an intense need to expand your brood. If you aren't careful, a few starter chickens can turn into eight or 12 or 20. I kept this in mind and restrained myself when the time came to make my first poultry purchase.

I had wanted chickens for a while, but one thing or another had always held me back... Chickens are smelly. Chickens like to scratch—they'll dig up the mulch in your flower beds. You don't have a coop. You can still buy eggs at the grocery store, can't you?

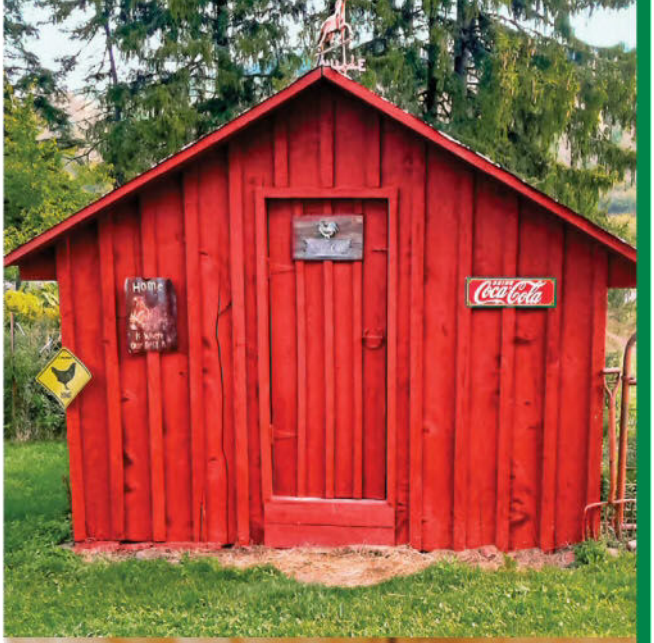
Then my husband and I moved to a farm with an existing coop and a fenced-in yard. I could visualize my chicken idea turning into reality. I definitely wanted Rhode Island Reds, and I definitely wanted laying hens—no roosters. After a bit of searching, I welcomed five lovely ladies into my family: Henrietta (the head hen), Amber, Lucy, Scarlet and Ginger. They settled in, and rewarded me with fresh eggs.

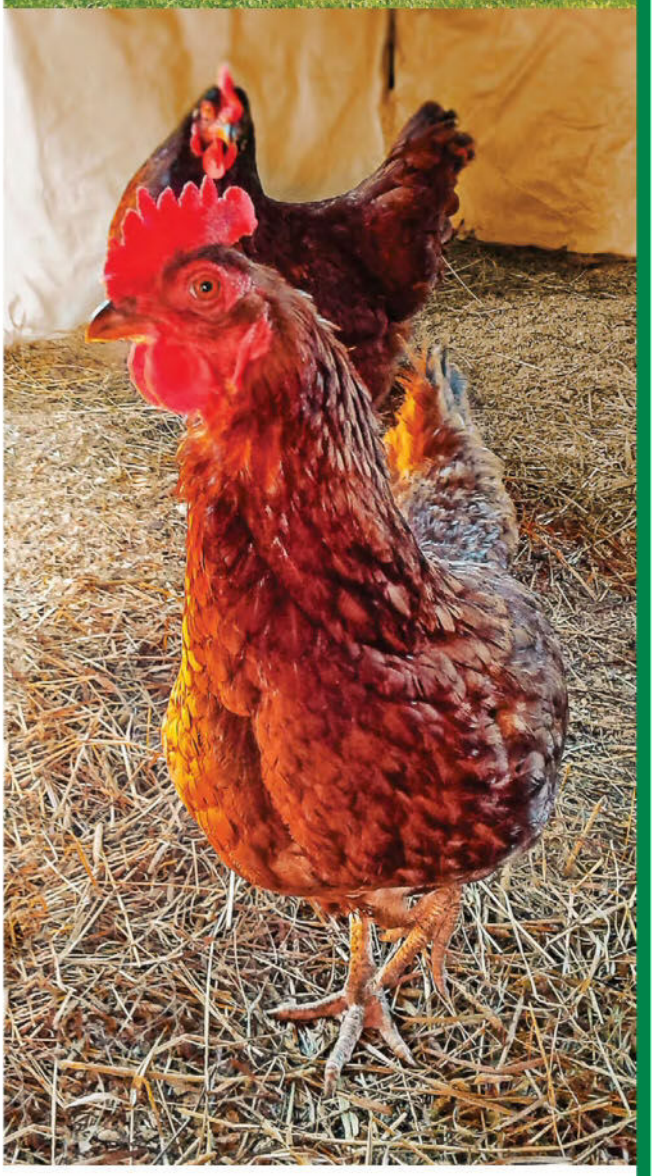
I vowed not to acquire any more chickens until the following spring, but I had a dilemma. If I got more chickens, what would I do with the extra eggs? A few of my friends also liked the thought of fresh-laid eggs, but either didn't have the right space or lived in a town where chickens weren't allowed. An idea began to form. Why not turn my chicken coop into a chicken co-op?

It is a simple model. Each person pays a membership fee to acquire a share. This covers the cost of a hen and monthly expenses for food and care. Members name their chickens, get pictures of their chickens, visit their chickens and, of course, receive fresh eggs.

Although my father-in-law still claims I'm running some type of chicken Ponzi scheme, I assure you that the co-op is quite honorable.

The co-op members and I did some research on breeds, and then we took a vote. We selected the Golden Laced Wyandotte, and soon enough, a group of fluffy sisters with shiny black and gold feathers arrived. Henny Penny, Audrey Henburn, Jennifer Heniston and Cleopatra quickly established themselves as members of the flock. Then, after patiently waiting and watching, came the prize. Little Henny Penny presented us with the first egg: extra small, brown, perfect.





Shellie's bright red co-op coop (top) is home to all nine of the group's chickens. Membership fees pay for acquiring a chicken (above), visitation and fresh eggs.

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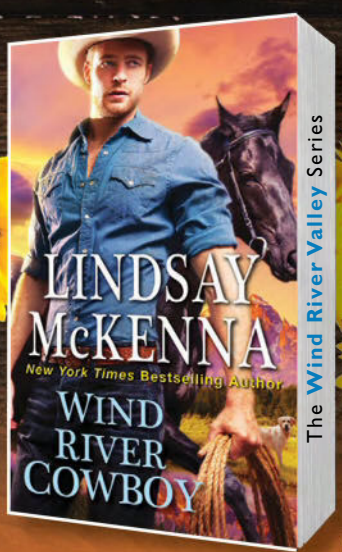

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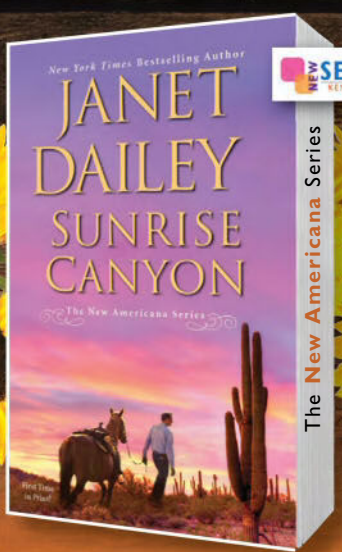

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A Different Kind of Cattle Call

Everyone in the Connell family has a role to play on branding day.

BY RACHEL CONNELL ***STAPLES, MINNESOTA***

The sun hasn't quite topped the trees by 6 a.m. on Mother's Day, but I need to get moving all the same. A crew of nearly 10 people is coming to brand and vaccinate more than 70 head of cattle. The trumpeting call of the sandhill crane echoes across the wetland near our house, and I smile on my way to saddle the horses because spring has come again.

My mother keeps an eye on two of our three children back at the house while my husband and I work alongside our eldest son, 10, and my father, brother, brother-in-law and a few friends.

My mare whinnies as I approach. The other horses wait and stamp impatiently. I finish tacking up all seven horses to bring in the herd just as a truck pulls into the yard. My husband is back with a cooler full of the vaccines we will be using throughout the day. He puts them in the barn refrigerator before joining me to watch the sun rise above the trees. We're almost ready.

The others begin to arrive within the hour. The chute is set up, and the smoke curls up from the blazing branding fire. The group mounts up, and we ride together through the double gates to bring in the herd. The animals aren't hard to find. We

Mother cows gather nervously around the gates (above) while their calves are roped for branding, vaccinations (far left) and ear tags (left). Branding day requires hours of hard work, but family and friends pitch in to help make it a success.

circle them and I take the drag with my son, herding from the rear. My husband, brother and brother-in-law have the flanks covered. My father rides point to push the lead cows toward the fence line.

The cattle trot down the alley, and we catch them in the holding pens near the chute. We dismount once the gates are shut and tie the horses in the barn. The sorting has begun. I grab my notepad and pen to write down the numbers of each cow, calf and bull we vaccinate. We quickly sort the calves from their mothers into a separate pen, and we push the cows through the chute to get their shots, bug pour, wormer and a new ear tag.

My brother remounts his horse to start roping calves. My husband and his brother hold each calf on the ground for vaccination. My father takes the branding iron from the fire, and the smell of burnt hair reaches my nostrils. I cringe at the pungent aroma.

Calves bawl and their mamas bellow as the day progresses. Curses and shouts fill my ears as a calf knocks someone to the ground or gets accidentally poked with a syringe needle. It's only 11 a.m. and we aren't even halfway done. Our feet are sore and our shoulders continue to slump, but we push on.

Two hours and a handful of Band-Aids later, we finally finish. The babies are returned to their mamas and the herd is back out in the pasture. In a week, the whole group will be divided into three separate teams and hauled to their summer pastures. I watch the calves nuzzle their mothers and smile when they come away with milk-frosted noses. It's a beautiful sight, and it makes the long, difficult day melt away.

We clean up all the gear and head up to the house for a late lunch. The sloppy joes and baked beans my mom prepared hit the spot after a long day of working cattle. We sit around the campfire, laughing and telling stories as we finish our meal. Then we say our goodbyes as our friends and family head for home. My husband hugs me close as we watch the sun begin to set. Another successful branding has come and gone in Minnesota.

City Girl Goes Country

A 43-acre dream farm is now home for this entrepreneurial homesteader.

STORY BY BETHANEE WRIGHT ***VERONA, WISCONSIN***

I was the first girl born into my father's family in 90 years. By the time I came along, we'd been entrepreneurial city dwellers for three generations; when I was growing up, we owned a hardware store that was just outside Milwaukee. But I always felt the pull of the countryside.

My adopted grandmother and mentor, Diane, took me under her wing, teaching me how to cook with the seasons and to sew like I was a seamstress. I also owe thanks to the incredible Sister Lucy of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, who taught me how to weed effectively and produce food on a larger-than-garden scale. A few years of internships and near-minimum-wage jobs on organic farms helped me learn the craft of gardening and make some cash in the summers.

After a few years of farm labor, I landed a job on a well-established 250-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, managing a crew of farm workers and worker shares. We'd pack boxes chock-full of vegetables every week during the growing season for our CSA members and fill the orders from restaurants and various wholesale accounts. People picked up their weekly CSA share from the farm or at one of the many drop-off sites we offered in town.

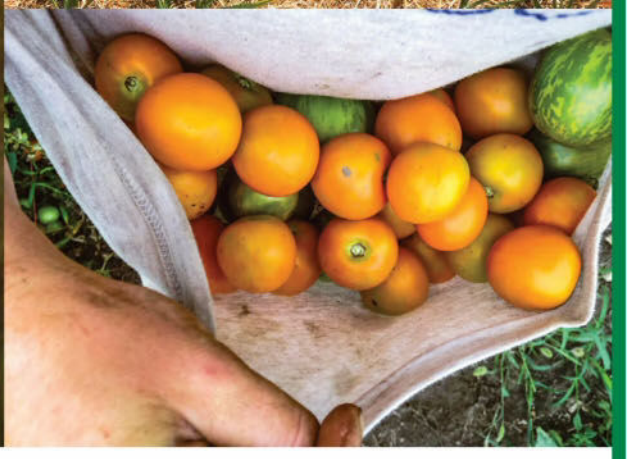
Though Bethanee planted on just 0.9 acre (top), she grew enough produce to fill gorgeous weekly boxes for 80 families (right).

Bethanee, her husband, Travis, and their dogs, Baela and Thoros, are settling into their dream farm.

I started my own operation, Winterfell Acres, named after the heroic Stark family's homestead from George R.R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire" book series. I served 20 families by renting land on that farm, and I continued to manage the larger CSA. My husband, Travis, and I lived on the farm in a 126-square-foot tiny house on wheels that year. It was a crazy and busy growing season capped with our marriage celebration under the giant oaks of southwestern Wisconsin.

After my first season with my own CSA, we moved to a new home and I moved my farm to rented land on a 100-acre dairy farm. I rented less than an acre, but I tripled the size of my CSA. I started selling to restaurants and wholesale accounts. I also decided to quit working for anyone but myself. The experience was terrifying and splendid! I was making all the decisions and setting my hours, but that also meant I was responsible for all the results. If I didn't get something done, it just didn't happen.

For the next growing season, I focused on optimizing as much of the farm as possible without increasing my acreage. I stayed



Bethanee's success includes an active social media presence. She shares photos of growing updates (top) and harvests (bottom) on Instagram and Facebook.

at 0.9 acre and increased my CSA membership to 80 families. I used part of a small garage as my washing and packing facility, but I could feel how tight everything was getting. My business was growing and I knew it would be my last year at that farm. I was ready to create a farm of my own!

Travis and I bought 43 acres south of Madison. All of a sudden we were caretakers of a tract that didn't seem so big on paper, but was huge in reality. Thirty acres were overgrown with honeysuckle and buckthorn. The 15 acres of pastures where I wanted to grow my vegetables were tired and depleted (although organically certifiable).

There was no infrastructure at all. We would have to build everything from scratch, even our home. But this is how we always wanted it. We didn't want to buy dilapidated farm buildings that wouldn't fit our needs as a vegetable farm. But it also meant we had a huge project to create our dream farmstead.

I work to encourage other women to follow their dreams, whether it's running their own farm, starting a business or writing a food blog.

My goal now is to make a decent, honest and fulfilling living by working off the land; to eat delicious food; and to feed my community of customers. All my financial and infrastructure decisions are based on those goals. I love that my farm is led by one woman, me, and I want it to stay that way.

Before I came along, the last woman born on my father's side of the family was my great-great-aunt Myrtle. She owned a delicatessen in Milwaukee in the 1930s, long before most women ever considered entrepreneurship. I am proud to come from a lineage that honors and supports that, regardless of gender. I work to encourage other women to follow their dreams, whether it's running their own farm, starting a business or writing a food blog. The world needs more people who are excited to go to work every day. I am doing my small part to help.

Travis and I will be building our home in 2017, my greenhouse is up, and my vegetable packing shed is built. I'm spreading compost on my three new field plots. I will be increasing my vegetable production to 1.2 acres and hope to feed more than 100 families this season. In addition, we're planting our dream mixed-species orchard. After years of planning and searching, we can finally have our farm. All we have to do now is build it.

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Mother Nature's Garden Plan

A California farm family uses an idea as old as dirt to protect crops from disease, pests and weather. **STORY AND PHOTOS BY DESTINY HAGEST**

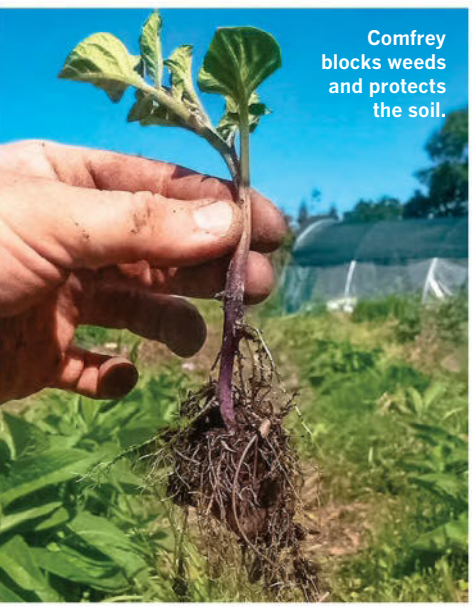
When Jonathan and Jennifer Christ started their 4-acre farm 10 years ago in Brentwood, California, they planted corn and tomatoes in traditional rows. Insects did a number on their crops, and the remaining plants didn't produce much.

"After spending the money and time, I knew there had to be a better way, a more productive and easier way, that would allow me to regenerate my soils, produce a quality product, and spend less time doing it," says Jonathan, who runs Marsh Creek Farmstead with his wife and their four children.

The Christs changed their approach and tried polyculture farming, a method that imitates the way plants grow in nature—in complementary combinations. An

ABOVE: JUSTIN AND KAYLA BUTTS, FOUR STRING FARM, ROCKPORT, TX FOURSTRINGFARM.COM

The "three sisters garden," a common companion planting, produces beautiful harvests of corn, beans and squash.



Comfrey blocks weeds and protects the soil.

Consciously grouped plants thrive with minimal maintenance.

increase in ground cover reduces dependency on pesticides by encouraging "good bugs" and prevents weed growth. In addition, plant diversity helps retain nutrients in the soil. The switch from single-crop rows to resource- and labor-conserving plant combinations may have saved the Christs' farm.

"Fast forward to today, nearly 10 years after I started, and things on the farm have never looked better," Jonathan says. "What started out as a mostly empty field of dirt rows has blossomed into a diverse polyculture of over 100 different types of perennial plantings. Fruits, nuts, vegetables and all kinds of herbs now dot the landscape, with yields available for sale 12 months of the year."

The key for Jonathan and Jennifer was comfrey, a multifaceted plant used for everything from animal feed to medicine. The ground cover crop has become Marsh Creek Farmstead's main source of income. The Christs sell the cuttings and crowns online to people all over the country, hoping to spread the word on the many uses of comfrey and other plants as they grow a business rooted in polyculture.

The term polyculture farming may sound like something new, but if you've ever grown a "three sisters garden"—planting corn, beans and squash in the same plot—you've practiced it. The cornstalks provide climbing support for the beans, while the squash plants sprawl below them both. The large leaves of squash plants block out weeds and protect the soil from the hot summer sun, just as the comfrey does on the Christs' farm.

Polyculture farming may sound like something new, but if you've ever grown a "three sisters garden"—planting corn, beans and squash in the same plot—you've practiced it.

Located about 50 miles east of San Francisco, the Christs are in a comfortable place to grow food. Temperatures range from the teens in winter to the low 90s in summer.

Though the temperatures work in the Christs' favor, rainfall can be

Jonathan and Jennifer are raising Jackson, Lily, McKenzie and Griffin on the family's 4-acre farm.

sparse. Polyculture planting helps there, too, allowing them to use less water. Being able to sell more crops than before is a bonus.

Jonathan's story is proof that polyculture is commercially viable, albeit on a small scale.

Like the Christs, a growing number of young farmers have begun to rethink their farming methods by incorporating plant diversity and self-sustaining plots—and examining every facet of their resource management as they scale up food production. Without rows of a single crop to harvest, Jonathan says he has even cut down on his gas bill. "I sometimes go a month or two without even starting the tractor!"

The challenge for polyculturists lies in large-scale production. Growing multiple crops in the same space often requires handpicking, a big burden for large farms.

Polyculture farming is about more than just yield—it's about leaving the landscape in better condition than when you started. That's what the Christs have done on their beautiful family farm.

Top Tips for Polyculture

You can do it at home!

The design of a plot is key to the success of both the plants and the harvest. **Backyard Abundance,** a nonprofit educational group in Johnson County, Iowa, has helped thousands of growers create environmentally beneficial gardens since it was founded in 2006.

You can improve your own yields—and save yourself some work—by following their baselines.

Maximize Coverage

Use a mix of ground covers—some that form clumps and others that spread by runners. Space taller plants so they aren't competing for resources like light, water and nutrients. This will also help the ground covers thrive.

Think of the Harvest

Keep fruits, vegetables and edible herbs with similar harvesting periods close together. Species with many harvests should be easy to get to, and walking paths should allow for adequate space to work.

Build Support Systems

Certain types of plants can perform functions that would otherwise be work for the gardener. Be sure to add at least one of each of these species to your polyculture plot:

Nitrogen fixers (*clover, New Jersey tea*)

Nutrient accumulators (*comfrey, dandelion*)

Nectar and pollen providers (*bee balm, anise hyssop*)

Weed suppressors (*thyme, oregano, strawberries*)

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Counting Sheep

A team of border collies helps this farmer watch over her flock.

Story by Denice Rackley *Bennington, Indiana*

PHOTOS BY RACHEL WRIGHT

These sheep are on the hunt for fresh spring grass.

Life tends to be busy on a sheep farm come spring, and my place is no exception. I currently have 80 North Country Cheviot ewes on 20 acres of pasture. My farm also has 40 acres of woods and 40 acres of crop ground that I rent out. I graze crop aftermath in the fall and use rotational grazing in the pastures to control parasites and better utilize the grass.

Sometimes I wonder how a girl raised in a suburban Cincinnati mobile home park ended up lambing ewes and raising working border collies. But I knew as a young girl that I wanted to work with animals. After graduating from college with a biology degree, I volunteered with a wildlife rehabilitation program and found my calling.

I moved to South Dakota to work on a cattle ranch. That was a huge change, but I loved it. One day I picked up a stray sheep walking down the highway. I found her owners, but that got me thinking about raising sheep. That spring I bought and raised 40 bottle lambs. That was over 20 years ago.

When my father passed away, I loaded up 20 ewes and three border collies and moved to Indiana to help out my mom. I try to be thankful for the small blessings in each day. Some of those blessings come in cute woolly packages. Others are little fur balls that grow into great partners. I couldn't do what I do without the help of my border collies. My latest litter of pups was born on Good Friday. They start out in the house, so I can check on them on the way to the kitchen to make milk replacer for bottle lambs.

You Call This Spring?

Friday I walked to the barn before sunrise with my border collie entourage, Blu, Meg, Scott and Zeva. After hanging bottles for the two bottle lambs, I moved on to check the lambing jugs, small pens that hold newborn lambs and their moms. Two ewes lambed overnight. Both lambs are up, dry and sucking this morning—a welcome sight.

Saturday It was warm this morning, so I slept in a bit. You need to take advantage of these rare opportunities. More new lambs were born last night. Meg is my girl to help with new lambs, so we moved the ewes and lambs behind the barn

One of the farm's border collies keeps the flock moving.

It's break time for Denice and her team of dogs, Blu, Meg, Scott and Zeva.

where they have access to shelter. Then I finished chores early to spend several hours with two women who brought in their border collies for herding lessons.

Sunday A friend came over to work her three border collies on sheep, so I brought Zeva, a 14-month-old pup, along for some training. She gets better every time we work; she's going to be a great dog.

Monday The bottle lambs are doing well. They spent the day in a dog kennel eating grass. If I leave them loose, they follow me around, getting underfoot. I moved the ewes and lambs into the yard to do some eco mowing. No need for a mower when I can turn grass into sheep.

Tuesday No new babies, but everyone still needed to be fed and checked. The grass is coming slowly, but I opened a gate to let the newer lambs and their moms out to a small pasture behind the barn. Blu and I went before dark to bring them in.

Thursday It has been chilly, windy and rainy recently. It rained again last night, so I got up early to check for lambs in the pasture and do my morning rounds. Then, in between pasture checks for new lambs, it was an inside day. I need to get organized for the herding clinic that I'm holding next weekend, which includes cleaning the house from top to bottom for the guests. I would much rather be outside.

Friday Yikes, it has been cold! The grass had frost on it this morning. Everything looked good on my early

morning barn check, so I bottle-fed and made sure the one new lamb had been up and sucked. After breakfast, I banded and tagged two new lambs and moved them and their mothers to the pasture for new pairs. It sure doesn't feel like spring today with all the rain, snow and sleet.

At noon, Indiana Public Media's Annie Corrigan interviewed me for her *Earth Eats* program. We took a tour of the farm and watched the dogs work before the interview.

Border Collie Clinic

Sunday Lots of lambs are being born, so Meg and I started the day with a predawn pasture check with a spotlight. We found two ewes with new lambs, and I also spotted a ewe having trouble lambing. We ran her up to a pen in the barn. Only the front of the lamb's head was visible. I pulled one front leg forward, then the other, and the lamb slid out with a bit of help. Thought for sure the little guy was dead, but he gasped as he came out. I tickled his nose with a piece of hay and rubbed him, and his breathing improved. The ewe turned around and began licking the lamb, so things look good for now.

Monday It was supposed to rain today, so I needed to get as much done as possible right after chores.

I want to move the 20 ewes yet to lamb into one pasture to make checking easier, but it's still wet from last night's rain. Grass should really start growing if it ever warms up. Afternoon rain is perfect for house cleaning—if ever there is a perfect time for cleaning.

Tuesday The rain and cold night took their toll on two lambs born overnight. They were both big single lambs. One was dead when I found it at daybreak with its mom standing over it. The other was alive, but barely. I brought it to the house to warm it up and feed it colostrum, but the lamb didn't make it. Even after 20 years of raising sheep, it bothers me to lose lambs.

Wednesday Morning chores revealed a set of twins doing well. I planned to work in town at my dog grooming business, so I was going to do chores and leave. That never seems to work. I saw an ewe that might've needed help lambing, so I got her to the barn. Sure enough, the lamb's head was not in the correct position. I worked for close to two hours and saved the ewe but not the lamb. Very disappointing.

I was already several hours late, but I spotted another ewe having trouble. This time the lamb was large but in the correct position. It did require my help, but ended with a healthy ram lamb. I finally got to work at 1:30, and thankfully only had three dogs to groom.

Zeva is ready for action.

Thursday I was up early cleaning and doing laundry since this is the last morning before the clinic. Morning chores were pleasantly uneventful. The rest of the day was devoted to major housecleaning in between pasture checks. I will have 12 people here for the next three days, working with stock dogs and learning to use them to assist with livestock on their farm.

Friday I was up early to get chores done and then make breakfast for myself and my friend Jack, the stock dog clinician. After breakfast, we moved sheep to different areas of the farm for people to work their dogs on. I was busy with the clinic till about 5, then Jack and I enjoyed a nice dinner while visiting. We stayed up till almost midnight talking. We'll pay for that tomorrow.

Saturday Quick morning chores, breakfast and working dogs all day long. All the dogs that came were border collies, but each was unique. They ranged from a 10-month-old pup that had never been on sheep to fully trained dogs. No dog or handler is perfect, so each animal had an area that needed work.

Puppies' First Adventure

Sunday Another day of training. You could see improvement with every dog's turn. Dogs and handlers all tried very hard, and you can't ask more than that. Everyone left this evening pleased with their progress.

Monday Today was a day of catching up. I slept in a bit, enjoying every second after my busy week. We put up some electric netting for one of the pastures. The grass is growing slowly with the freezing temperatures last weekend, but 80 degrees today should get it going.

Filled water tanks and checked on the newer lambs and gave my guardian Great Pyrenees dogs their summer haircut. I had a late lunch then checked the 10 ewes yet to lamb. I did evening chores 30 minutes early because I wanted to relax on the porch with a glass of wine and a good book.

Tuesday The weather was perfect to let the pups outside for their first adventure. They explored a bit, ate their puppy food, and settled down to nap. Then I fixed dinner for the dogs and finally for myself. I am usually last to eat, which is the way things go when you raise livestock.

Thursday The pups woke me up early this morning. They're 4 weeks old, so it's time they transitioned from the whelping box to a pen. They will be weaned in two weeks, and I'm sure Griz will be pleased to pass on her motherly duties to me.

One of the twin lambs is looking thin, so I made her a bottle. She drank some. Only nine ewes left to lamb, and I am ready for the last lambs to be on the ground.

Keeping track of all these ewes and their new lambs requires patience and a keen eye.

We had a nice visit at breakfast, then got to work moving sheep to different areas of the farm for people to work their dogs on.

Denice moves electric netting to open new pasture for the sheep (left). Rotating pastures keeps the sheep in tall grass (below left).

And Then There Were Two

Sunday It was a pretty morning—sunshine and clear sky. I moved electronic netting to give the sheep a new patch of grass. They seemed pleased. Afternoons have turned into puppy time. I sat and laughed at them playing and exploring while I ate lunch today. The world must seem big when you are so small.

Monday I have two new lambs this morning, but I'm having trouble deciding who the mother is. Two ewes are talking to the lambs. Occasionally an ewe that's close to lambing gets confused and tries to claim newborn lambs that are not hers. I thought they were the right size to be twins, but now I'm not sure. Both lambs look good, so I am not too concerned.

Tuesday One of the last ewes to have twins doesn't seem to be milking well. I moved them to the barn to offer the lambs a bottle. Catching them is always tricky for the first couple days, especially when their mother would rather not have me messing with them.

Wednesday I had a herding lesson with a new person and her two dogs. I am never sure what to expect the first time out. I used Zeva to demonstrate how herding with a young dog should look, before getting started with the new dogs. You have to see the goal to know where you're headed.

Thursday Puppies were messy overnight, so that was the first thing on the list this morning. After bottle-feeding, I moved the ewes and lamb group out to the back pasture with Zeva. I took Blu along for backup. He is slowing down some at 13, which makes me sad. He still wants to work, so I save the easier things for him. Zeva is young and needs experience, so this was a perfect team to get the job done. They worked well together.

Friday The last set of twins is drinking a bit from the bottle and looking better. The ewe will go on the first train out of here since she is not milking well enough to raise her lambs. She joins a few others on the cull list. With only two ewes yet to lamb, chores seem a lot easier.

Saturday With the end of lambing near, a new rotational grazing routine will begin. I'll be moving electronic net to new grazing areas, and then using the dogs to move the sheep back and forth.

Pups will be going to new homes in a few weeks, so I am spending as much time as possible enjoying them. Their antics always make me smile. My life revolves around the cycle of birth, growth, harvest and breeding. I try to manage the sheep to take the best advantage of the seasons. That's why I try to lamb later in the spring, when the ewes and lambs can be outside on free grass, not inside eating expensive feed. Plus, the less time I spend cleaning the barn, the better.

I hope to convert the crop ground to pasture and increase my flock to 200 ewes. My goal is to raise great sheep and working dogs that will assist me—and others—in making a living on the farm. The journey has its ups and downs, but I have tried to learn from each day and not make the same mistakes twice.

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North Bear Creek, considered one of the best trout streams in Iowa, runs through the Langlands' farm.

Living the Nordic Way

Norwegian heritage is a strong influence on this family's farm in northeastern Iowa.

Story by Steve Langland *Decorah, Iowa*

PHOTOS BY BRITTANY TODD

Velkommen (welcome) to Valley View Farm! I'm Steve Langland, and I farm with my retired parents, Walter and Adeline, 1 mile from the Minnesota state line. My great-grandfather founded the farm in 1877. My grandparents raised nine children in this house.

Conservation has long been a part of our farm and it began during the Depression, when the Civilian Conservation Corps laid out contour strips, built new fences, and helped implement other parts of the New Deal. Dad and I have continued the tradition by working with government agencies and Trout Unlimited on several projects aimed at keeping livestock away from the stream banks. Because of our efforts and those of Bear Creek Watershed landowners, North Bear Creek is the best trout stream in Iowa. We've hosted many tours of the farm and have done two programs with Iowa Public Television.

My parents, who were both teachers, decided to build a home here in 1976, when my Uncle Maurice retired and sold them his share of the farm. They built one of the first freestall systems in northeastern Iowa.

The Valley View Farm barn has been standing since 1913.

Currently, my father and I run 450 acres of corn, soybeans, oats and alfalfa along with pasture. Because of the hilly terrain, about half the ground is tillage, and the rest is in pasture and timber. We sold the dairy cattle in 1988, and since then we have maintained a commercial Angus herd. At one time we were up to 200 head, but we have reduced it to a more manageable 50. My parents are technically retired, but they're still very active in the farm's day-to-day operation.

Ready the Fields

Sunday Chores were light with the cattle on pasture this morning. I finished up before heading to church with my parents. Then they left for Clear Lake, Iowa, two hours west, to help celebrate my sister's birthday. I stayed behind and spent much of the day being domestic, doing laundry and cleaning. With all the fieldwork we do, Sunday is about the only day I have to play catch-up around the house.

Monday I started cleaning the corn planter today. We finished planting corn April 25, which is the earliest on record for this farm. I had to leave for a noon meeting at a nursing home in town; I'm president of the board of directors. We've added a chronic-confusion and dementia wing and a short-term rehabilitation unit over the past three years.

Tuesday The agronomist stopped in to review our micronutrient order for the soybean soil. We'll need to meet with him again in a couple of weeks to order herbicide for the corn. Today is ladies day at the country club. Mom gave up golf several years ago, but still goes to lunch and to play bridge.

I hosted a photographer who arrived to take pictures of the farm and a small cave here. The photos will be part of a presentation in honor of my late uncle Joseph T. Langland, who was an accomplished poet as well as an English professor at the University of Wyoming and the University of Massachusetts. A series of poems in his book *The Wheel of Summer* was based on his life growing up here.

Wednesday Today, Dad hosted John Howe, head of the Raptor Resource Project, which sponsors the eagle cam in Decorah. When the nest there blew down last year, Dad mentioned that we had an eagle nest on the property. Now, two eagle cams are running, one in Decorah and one on our farm. John and Dad left some trout near the nest for the eagles and their three eaglets. There's some concern the smallest one isn't getting enough nutrition.

I spent a quiet evening catching up with friends online. My two dogs also appreciated some time with me. I have a Chihuahua, which I raised from a tiny puppy, and a Pembroke Corgi, a rescue dog that joined us two years ago. Our border collie, Muffy, rules the roost outside and spends her days waiting for a ride on the Kawasaki Mule or the golf cart. She loves to help with the cattle, but gets a little too excited and fails to heed her commands at times.

Thursday The order from the co-op arrived so I helped Dad start spreading the micronutrients after lunch. With low commodity prices, some people are forgoing their applications of nutrients this year, but we felt it was worthwhile to apply them. It's still more affordable to keep up on soil tests rather than ignore them and spend far more later to make up the deficiencies.

Steve and his parents, Adeline and Walter

Muffy is always up for a ride.

Our border collie, Muffy, rules the roost outside and spends her days waiting for a ride on the Kawasaki Mule or the golf cart.

Friday I talked with the person who rents the pasture next door, and a cow they were missing is in with ours. We do a good job of maintaining our fences, but this cow can leap like a deer. I also planted 24 acres of soybeans.

Saturday I started rolling the soybean ground I planted yesterday. Rolling the ground firms the seedbed, pushes rocks below the surface, and flattens cornstalks from the previous year. It makes combining so much easier come fall.

I noticed that the bulls were in a standoff, and within 15 minutes they had gone through the fence. There's no cellphone reception there, so I had to make a fast trip to the yard and alert Dad, then race back down to the broken fence. When I returned, all the bulls and the two cows were out running. I got them back into their pasture and repaired the fence.

Days When the Rains Came

Sunday Happy Mother's Day! We attended early service at our sister parish this week since our church had late service today. It's only 6 miles away, and we've been a joint congregation since 1895. Then we took Mom to the country club for Mother's Day brunch.

Monday It's cloudy outside with a threat of rain in the forecast, so I went directly out to the field and worked up another 8 acres for soybeans. I got it planted, and Dad was able to roll about half of it before the rain started.

Tuesday I fed the bulls and rode around the pasture fence to make repairs before opening that area to the beef cows and calves. We're fortunate to be able to rotate pasture, and the cows eagerly follow either the golf cart or the Mule.

Wednesday I wanted to get the lawn mowed before the rain got here. I started after lunch, but the belt broke on the zero-turn mower. I had to rely on the backup, a traditional riding tractor. Talk about a change from being able to zip around the trees and such. The reserve mower slowed me enough that I didn't finish before the rain came. I went to town to pick up the new belt since I couldn't do much else in the rain.

Sadly, the smallest in the eagle nest died despite the best efforts of the Raptor Resource Project and Department of Natural Resources.

Thursday I finally got the fertilizer wagon cleaned and the unloading auger oiled. Also moved a couple other less-used pieces of equipment to another shed and pulled out the sprayer. Corn spraying will be here soon, as most of the corn has now emerged and the stand looks good.

Friday I've never considered Friday the 13th to bring me bad luck, but it makes you think about the

The Angus herd grazes in the pasture.

superstition attached to it. I put a new tire on the Kawasaki, which had a blowout Tuesday. I don't know what we would do without it because Dad and I have had both knees replaced. Muffy agrees; she loves to ride as well.

Saturday I woke up to 42 degrees this morning. It felt more like October than May. The fields are still too wet to work from the rain during the week, so we had an easy day. Dad fed the bulls in the valley and I cleaned out a couple flower beds around my house.

A Bit of Local Culture

Monday Dad and I started running the soil finisher again this morning and I planted 15 acres of soybeans. It seems we underestimated the amount of seed we needed, since I ran out around dusk. I checked on the corn while I was out there and only found a couple of low-lying areas with minor frost damage from yesterday morning, when the temps dipped below freezing.

Tuesday We're big into our Norwegian heritage around here, and it's officially Syttende Mai in Norway! This celebrates the signing of the Norwegian constitution, the second oldest in the world. A small celebration in Decorah is sponsored by the Vesterheim museum, which houses the largest collection of Norwegian-American artifacts in the world. Decorah also hosts Nordic Fest every July.

The co-op delivered another load of soybeans, so I loaded the bean drill, finished 21 acres, and ran to town for more soybeans. When I got home, a neighbor stopped in to tell us that two yearling bulls were out running on the road. We dropped everything to get them back home, then I checked every inch of the fence and couldn't find a break. Got the rest of the beans planted, though. What a relief. Now we need rain.

Wednesday Our neighbor called again—the same bulls that got out yesterday got out again and joined his cattle overnight. After I brought them home, I realized that one is a jumper. He cleared a gate with no damage and got in with the beef cows. I think he's earned a trip to the sales barn. Once a jumper, always a jumper.

Thursday During breakfast the man who bought our hay chopper called about getting it. We stopped filling our silos with hay and corn silage two years ago, and I don't miss fighting the silo unloader.

I also helped with a 4-H spaghetti supper fundraiser, and it was a great success. The group served roughly 300 people. None of the parents had boiled spaghetti for that many people before, so my experience came in handy. I've done a lot of "quantity cooking" for community events. I was lucky enough to come home with a bag of coffee from a local roaster as a thank-you!

Friday My cousins from out of state started to arrive today. They won't be staying with us, but in an Airbnb rental so that they can be together. Sunday is the retrospective

From replacing tires to delivering buckets of feed in the fields, Steve is a jack-of-all-trades on Valley View Farm.

of their father (my Uncle Joe). It will be great to see them and the rest of the local family over the weekend.

For Uncle Joe

Sunday We enjoyed a very nice presentation in honor of my late Uncle Joe's poetry and life. Along with his teaching career and poetry, he was among the first troops involved in the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany at the end of World War II. All three of his children were able to make it and were recognized during the program, and the display included wonderful family photos I had never seen before. Visiting with the cousins made for a long night, but it was worth it.

Monday As most of you know, our farming schedule sometimes gets altered to accommodate company when they're in town. I got a few things done this morning, but we're fortunate to spend time with family before they fly out tomorrow.

Tuesday Things are back to normal now that everyone is gone. Dad and I returned the escaped non-jumper bull to the rest of the group. The other bull is heading to the sales barn shortly.

Wednesday Unfortunately, Dad got rained out on golf today, but there's still bridge to be played at the country club. We also got the news from the DNR that another of the eaglets had died of unknown causes and the webcam was being shut down. The DNR hopes scientists at Iowa State University can determine the cause of death.

Steve and Muffy take a ride to check on the cows.

Thursday The agronomist was here to help make a herbicide plan for the corn. I need to get spraying since it's growing so fast. After he left, I got the sprayer out of the shed, cleaned the screens and nozzles, then ran it, so I'm ready to go.

Friday We're welcoming the rain today and celebrating more in the forecast. I had a haircut appointment today and made a day of it since everything is so wet. I had lunch and then took flowers to the cemetery for my grandparents and aunt. Also picked up mulch for the landscaping for my house and herbicide for the corn. It was very foggy when I let the dogs out before bedtime. More rain is on the way.

Saturday My parents and I went to the graduation party of a neighbor's daughter. It was nice to hear her plans to attend Iowa State in an ag-related field. I went to supper with friends from Decorah. Saturday and Sunday nights I enjoy eating at the many fantastic restaurants in town. The rest of the week I typically cook or grill meals at home.

Monday Happy Memorial Day! My parents went to the military rites at church before going to a program at the courthouse. I fed the bulls and sprayed corn. I got roughly 16 acres done before the sprayer tank cracked. That ended any spraying.

Tuesday I managed to corral the neighbor's heifer that got in with our herd earlier in the month; the owner came to pick her up. We also penned up the fence-hurdling bull and locked him in the barn so he can go for sale on Friday. The one surviving eaglet is doing extremely well and the parents are spending less time in the nest with it. We'll be finished supplementing their food with extra trout by the end of next week.

I hope you enjoyed your visit to Valley View Farm and Decorah as much as I enjoyed telling you about it. We hope to see you in the hills of northeastern Iowa soon.

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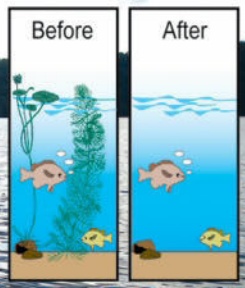

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Starting Them Early

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1 "My son Clayton loves the 1/4-scale John Deere model his great-grandpa made for him," says his mom, **Larissa Yonker of Hamilton, Michigan.** "Clayton was just 8 months old here, but his love of John Deere was already clear!"

2 "Josiah Hornbrook was having too much fun on his great-uncle's Farmall tractor," says his aunt, **Becky Charleston of Naperville, Illinois.**

3 "My great-niece Nora took her brother's Farmall tractor for a spin on her first birthday," says **Sue Krahn of Wykoff, Minnesota.** "She couldn't reach the pedals, but she sure did have fun."

4 "Our daughter Sophia struck a pose on my John Deere lawn tractor," says dad **David Spraggs of Boulder, Colorado.** "My wife, Andrea, and I take a monthly photo of Sophia to watch her grow."

2

3

4

Making Dad Proud

My dad worked as a mechanic at a Ford dealership in Wisconsin back in the 1940s and '50s. He would get calls from farmers who couldn't start their tractors in Wisconsin's cold winter, and off he would go. I have always loved tractors because of my dad. When we saw this 1955 Ford 800 series tractor at auction, I couldn't let it go to another bidder. It was in bad shape, but my husband, Dennis, restored it to a beautiful running condition. My dad would be so proud of this awesome tractor.

JEANNE LISH
WINCHESTER, CALIFORNIA

One Tough Ford

I bought this Ford Powermaster 861 in South Dakota in 1992, and I've dragged the both of us all over the United States since then. These days we're both living in Texas and semi-retired—me from a career as a private investigator and the Ford from a lifetime of farming.

After hours of restoration work, the Powermaster wasn't just restored but reborn. Now I use this tractor to keep our pastures looking great, and I wash and wax it after each use. It starts better than my new Ford F-150 truck.

A.D. "SKIP" ENSLEY ***FATE, TEXAS***

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69265/62344

Customer Rating ★★★★½

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- 212 CC ENGINE
- 70 dB ULTRA QUIET

Customer Rating ★★★★½

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HaulMaster — SUPER COUPON

- 1000 lb. capacity

Customer Rating ★★★★★

MOVER'S DOLLY

ITEM 60497/93888 shown
61899/62399/63095/63096
63098/63097

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

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POWDER-FREE NITRILE GLOVES-PACK OF 100

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Customer Rating ★★★★★

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CENTRALPNEUMATIC — SUPER COUPON

3 GALLON, 100 PSI OILLESS AIR COMPRESSORS

SAVE 59%

A. HOT DOG
ITEM 69269/97080 shown

B. PANCAKE
ITEM 95275 shown
60637/61615

Customer Rating ★★★★½

YOUR CHOICE ~~$99.99~~ $39.99

~~$59.99~~
comp at $98.62

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Maybe Raising Cattle Isn't for Everyone

After buying cows, a new farmer learns cows are more challenging than expected.

BY TED BLANKENSHIP *ROSE HILL, KANSAS*

Hazel (left) seems to be plotting her next escape attempt from one of Ted's three fenced-in pastures (above).

The other day I was looking at the fences that enclose our 20 acres. Well, to be more precise, I was mostly looking at the holes in the fences. Happily I don't have to worry about them any more. Why? Because we don't have any cows—that's why.

Not long after we purchased our property, I decided that buying cows was a good way to keep the grass short. They would eat the grass, and then we would eat the cows, saving us the need to eat the grass.

It seemed like a good idea until we named the heifers. The vet came by to give them shots shortly after we named them. The first thing he said was, "Don't name the cows."

It was a little too late. There was Hazel, Curious, Gentle, Little Cow, Brown Cow and another one I don't remember. The vet was right, of course. They had become pets, and you don't usually eat your pets.

The fences on the place were designed to keep in sheep. Soon after I began this adventure, my daughter came home for Christmas. "Dad," she said with an all-knowing look, "you had better get some barbed wire on those fences."

I should tell you that Hazel was a big heifer. To make things worse, she had a stubborn look. She seemed to be telling me, "Go ahead, put up barbed wire. It's not stopping me."

I installed a strand of barbed wire at the top of the fences. Then Hazel started rooting underneath. So, I placed a second strand along the bottom. Hazel waited until it rained enough to get the ground soft, then she just stomped the fence down and walked over it. At this point, chicken farming looked pretty good.

A friend offered me his Angus bull while he rearranged his pasture. I took him up on it, and wouldn't you know, all six heifers became cows.

The next season we had another six calves, four of which were bulls. The vet came over, chased them all around and made them into steers.

The third group of calves—four more bulls—was a problem. Ideally, they're made into steers young. We waited too long; these calves were like Great Danes. I called a neighbor for help. He asked if we had an enclosure, and I said I had a dog run.

We got into the run with the four calves. My neighbor grabbed some legs and threw a calf on its side.

I found a neck and sat on it. The bull threw me to the top of the dog run and scrambled to his feet. By then, one of the mothers had come to see what we were doing. She tried to get in, and I tried to get out. In 45 minutes (it seemed like 45 days) the deed was done.

Surprisingly, the neighbor still speaks to me. I saw the experience as an omen: Get out of the cattle business. And so I did.

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Mom's apron was the original multipurpose tool.

HALFPOINT/SHUTTERSTOCK

If This Apron Could Talk

Mom's held chickens, vegetables and family memories.

BY RICHARD EDGINGTON ***COLUMBUS GROVE, OHIO***

We live in a world of multipurpose. The TV remote handles many different functions (if you can learn what they are). Trucks rumble down the road carrying everything from needles to automobiles. Telephones can now take and store photos, play you a tune and, if you're lucky, make and receive calls.

But my mom's apron was the original multipurpose item. She made it herself, preferring flowery material. It had a yoke that went around her neck and strings that crossed in the back and tied in the front. It came to her knees to keep her dress clean, and provided a large front pocket.

Mom's apron held kindling to start the morning fire in the old kitchen range. It also made a good potholder.

In the afternoons, Mom would gather up her apron by the corners and walk through the garden. There she would direct me to pick certain vegetables, such as tomatoes, green beans, radishes and roasting ears—my favorite. All of it fit in her apron, and no matter how much she put in, it never seemed to get full. (I could never figure that out.) I didn't like picking the vegetables, but I loved filling my always hungry stomach with them at suppertime.

One chilly evening in spring, Mom came in with an apron that was full of little chirping balls of fuzz. She had carried in the chicks from the brooder in the chicken house, where it might have been too cold. I got the washtub and put some rags in the bottom. She carefully deposited the chicks in the tub and lowered a single lightbulb, which dangled from a long cord over them.

"That ought to hold them for tonight," she said.

A few months later, she was shooing those chicks out of her garden by flapping her apron.

I knew not to bother her in the afternoons when she would listen to her soap operas. She would fill her apron pocket with sewing and things to mend while she sat through the many trials and tribulations of *Bachelor's Children, Ma Perkins, Stella Dallas* and *Lorenzo Jones*. She said the pocket was handier than a sewing basket.

The apron corners made an excellent wipe for tears or, with a little spit, dirt. And there were probably many more uses I've long since forgotten.

In my opinion, Mom's apron was the original multipurpose item. But what I remember most is the loving mother who wore it.

Laundry Day Was a Family Affair

Mother's work ethic was an inspiration to her eight children.

BY PHYLLIS ENDRESEN (AS TOLD TO GAIL M. SIECKMAN) ***RIDGEFIELD, WASHINGTON***

Doing laundry for our large family was quite the task. Mother's laundry days were Monday and Thursday, and she did all her wash the old-fashioned way. She bought 2-inch thick bars of dark yellow soap, carefully sliced off a few thin pieces of soap from the end, and placed them in a pot of water to warm on the woodstove. The soap melted in the water and created liquid detergent. If any of the softened soap was left at the end of the day, she used a dollop for her dishwater so none went to waste.

I was born in 1924, the youngest of eight children. As the baby, I wasn't expected to do the same chores as the older kids, but I can still tell you in great detail about the work it took to keep our farm going without electricity or running water.

My older brothers were pushed into service for laundry days. They filled 5-gallon buckets at the well which would be poured into a laundry boiler on the stove. The boiler, an oblong metal container with handles, could hold about 20 gallons. When the boiler water was hot, Mother filled her washtub and rinse tub. Built of wooden slats on the outside and tin on the inside, the washtub was fitted with a hand-operated agitator and a scrub board.

Mother started laundry with the whites—including the sheets and towels—before moving on to darker colors. She coaxed the dirt from the fabric with her strong hands and steady effort before putting them through the double-roll wringer. Into the rinse water she poured bluing, which isn't nearly so hard on fabric as bleach but still leaves whites bright and clean.

During the summer, the clean laundry was shaken out and hung on lines in the yard. Sometimes Mother laid out our underclothes on the roof of the cellar's entrance, where the sunlight could dry them. She would assign one of us kids to watch the drying undergarments, turning them over so they would dry quickly and could be put away inside.

Mother baked bread on laundry days, since the house was already warm and the yeast rose quickly. How she worked, my mother!

In later years, Mother and Daddy acquired a washing machine with a gas-driven agitator. It ran outdoors and made a *putt-putt* sound that echoed through the whole valley. It was more modern and must have relieved Mother of some amount of labor, but she never ran out of work. Recalling her energy never ceases to amaze and impress me.

Mother baked bread on laundry days, since the house was already warm and the yeast rose quickly. How she worked, my mother!

The sun was the only dryer before Mother had laundry machines.

AFRICA STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Holding those chicks reinforced the meaning of Easter for Nelda.

Itty-Bitty Easter Biddies

A father's simple surprise leaves a lasting memory for his children.

BY NELDA HOWELL LOCKAMY ***GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA***

It was the early 1950s, and yet another hard-candy Christmas had come and gone in our little pocket of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Little was expected and little received in terms of bicycles or Betsy Wetsy dolls. While the six of us kids questioned the existence of a Santa Claus who would leave such meager fare under our scrawny tree, we were in for a more memorable holiday at Easter thanks to my father.

Some three weeks before Easter, our father had set one of his fat Dominique hens on a clutch of eggs. We kids did not have access to the chicken house during this time, and if indeed the eggs hatched before Easter morning, it was a closely guarded secret.

As soon as it became daylight, Daddy emerged from the henhouse carrying his everyday hat, an old engineer's cap from his railroading days. As he rounded the path by the spring, we could hear faint peeps. Daddy bent down on the porch and presented the cap's treasure to his children. Inside was a pile of quivering, pale yellow biddies—one for each of us. While Mother watched this presentation with the awe it deserved, his calloused hands cupped each chick. Repeating the admonition to handle them gently, he placed a trembling fluff of flesh into each pair of outstretched hands.

The chicks were barely dry, smelled of the barnyard, and had chips of eggshell matted to their feathers. But to a 6-year-old they felt like pulsating gold, their cottony feathers and parchment skin stretched over tiny bones. We children cuddled the chicks until Daddy declared that their clucking mother missed them. After we had given each of them a name (mine was Goldilocks) and were convinced that we could positively identify our own, we placed the wobbly peeps back in Daddy's cap so that he could return them to their nervous mother's nest.

I don't recall playing with the Easter hatchlings again, nor did we get too excited over future broods that spring. At some level, we must have connected them to the chicken and dumplings that showed up at every Sunday dinner. But that simple Easter surprise was our sunrise service and Alleluia chorus all rolled into a single event. When the miracle of new life caused tears to roll down my father's face, there was no room to doubt the message I would hear in church that day.

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by James Victor

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by James Victor

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We're celebrating our upcoming **40th anniversary** by revisiting some of our favorite stories throughout the years. See page 64 for details on how to contact us if there's anything you'd like to see again!

The team of Belgian horses pulled the hitch across the country over 16 months.

Coast to Coast by Horse & Hitch

A stagecoach driver recounts his extraordinary cross-country expedition.

BY CHRISTINA CRAIG ASSOCIATE EDITOR

David Helmuth does everything big. Back in 1993, when Reiman Publications hired him to drive *Country's* Reminisce Hitch across the United States, he insisted that the hand-picked team of six beautiful Belgian horses walk from one end of the United States to the other.

"If I'm driving horses across the country, " David says, "I am going ocean to ocean."

The goal of the excursion, chronicled in *Farm & Ranch Living* and its sister publications *Country* and *Reminisce*, was to reconnect seniors with the horses they remembered from their families' farms. The hitch stopped at nursing homes and senior centers across the country. The horses also visited schools, performed at fairgrounds, and marched in parades. The hitch stopped regularly to pick up folks for a ride on the wagon—and more than 38,000 did.

The adventure began on April 13 that year, when the Belgians splashed through the cool Atlantic surf

1993: The six prized horses were transported by truck to start the second half of the journey from the West Coast.

David and the Reminisce Hitch crew brought one of the horses right into a nursing home in 1993 to visit with residents (left). David now drives the Wells Fargo stagecoach (bottom).

BOTTOM: DAVID HELMUTH

in Kennebunkport, Maine. Ultimately, the journey lasted 16 months and took David, a caravan of crew members, a semitrailer, and the team horses to places he never dreamed of.

"Hospitals and nursing homes in Maine contacted me because they wanted their patients and residents to see the horses," he says. "One day we loaded one of our star horses, Stoney, in a truck and brought him to a nursing home. It was raining, so they asked if we could bring Stoney inside, and we took him right into that nursing home. That experience changed something in me and showed me that I had something to give to these people."

David knew the trek would be a long one, so he abided by a rule his grandfather had passed down.

"My grandpa always said, 'A good horse will only go 10 miles a day.' These were champion horses, and I didn't want to take away their spirit and heart," he says. "I wanted their spirit and heart to connect with the readers that we met along the route. We stopped every mile to pick up people so they could ride on the wagon."

The Mississippi River flooded that year and, after he arrived at its edge in Niota, Illinois, David wanted to do something for residents who had lost their homes.

"We let those people ride on the wagon as we crossed the river with the American flag flying," he says.

After crossing the Mississippi, the hitch pushed on into Iowa. Once the weather turned cold, however, the crew was forced to change the trip's course. They implanted a golden horseshoe in the town square of Centerville, Iowa, marking the trip's midway point. Then the horses rested for several weeks before being hauled, along with the hitch, to San Diego via semitrailer.

On Dec. 13 the Belgians trotted through the waves of the Pacific, then turned back to retrace their return journey to the Midwest. A crowd of 5,000 cheered them when they finished back in Centerville on Aug. 12, 1994.

Although that trip was over, David kept traveling.

"I hauled for Hormel Foods for two years after the trip," he says. "Then I became the driver of the Wells Fargo stagecoach. I've been with Wells Fargo for 16 years now."

David, who lives in Milledgeville, Georgia, drives the coach at about 200 events per year. He takes it to schools, bank openings and parades across the country, including seven Rose Bowl parades. It's clear the seasoned driver loves being on the move.

"My tanks are full. Just give me an address, and we will be there," David says. "I only do things that are absolutely amazing and that are a joy to do. I'm just the happiest person in the world."

Submission Guidelines

Send Us Your Story Share your stories and photos with us using the online form at *farmandranchliving.com/submit*.

Help Us Sort Things Out Include the name of the department your submission is for (Kernels from Kids, Tractor Talk, etc.). For any photos you submit, please identify the people, city, state and year the photo was taken. We reserve the right to use submissions in any section of our magazine, or elsewhere.

What You'll Get If we print your submission in the magazine, we will send you a complimentary copy of the issue in which it appears, and any compensation as may be specified by us in writing.

Photos We accept high-resolution digital images. Digital images should be about 4 x 6 inches at a minimum resolution of 300 dots per inch, or about 1200 x 1800 pixels. Photos must be in focus and of good quality. Please send submissions only through our online form.

Returns We do not return submitted materials. Although we are unable to acknowledge receipt of any submissions, we'll let you know if they're published.

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Lucky Horseshoe Contest

We hid a drawing of a horseshoe like the one above on page 31 of the February/March issue. Then we drew names at random from all the readers who found it. Each winner received a year's subscription to *Farm & Ranch Living*. The lucky horseshoe could be hidden anywhere in this issue, so keep a sharp eye out. If you find it, enter the contest on our website, **farmandranchliving.com.**

From those submissions, we'll draw additional names and send those readers a year's subscription or subscription extension to *Farm & Ranch Living*. No purchase necessary to enter to win. Purchase will not improve your chances of winning. The sweepstakes is open to legal residents age 18 years or older of the U.S., its territories and possessions, or of Canada (excluding the Province of Quebec). Sweepstakes begins March 24, 2017, and ends May 26, 2017. For official rules, visit *farmandranchliving.com*. VOID WHERE PROHIBITED. Sweepstakes sponsored by RDA Enthusiast Brands, LLC.

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